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ABSTRACT

This is a report of a study of classroom assignments as perceived by seniors in four rural and smalltown high schools in eastern Kentucky. However, the approach taken in the study could be useful in the appraisal of programs in any school. The study hypothesized that (1) the learning content is experience, and a given experience is related to the goals of the activity which constitute that experience; and that (2) what students do is a function of the role settings the school provides and the numbers of those settings in relation to the numbers of students. The assignment was perceived to be the prime instrument, device, or means by which the teacher generates role situations wherein students could develop into the kinds of people the school is intended to produce. The model of teaching assumed was that effective teaching places the teacher in an eternal dilemma between guiding enough and guiding too much. The approaches developed and applied in this study should enable school staffs in any school to gather information useful as a basis for making better judgments about where the balance of emphasis in assignments might be placed for more effective teaching. (Author/EA)

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THE ASSIGNMENT--A WAY TO SHAPE THE CURRICULUM

How High School Seniors View Their Assignments and Some of their Perspectives of their School Experiences

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This is a report of a study of classroom assignments as they were perceived by seniors in four rural and small-town high schools in eastern Kentucky. The findings can be generalized, therefore, only for such schools. The approach taken in the study, however, should be useful in appraisal of program in any school; indeed, the essential value in this study may be in the approach rather than in its specific findings.

The theory context of the study has as basic postulates that:

1) The content of learning is experience, and a given experience is related to the goals of the activity which constitutes that experience. The curriculum, therefore, is not a lesson plan, a course outline, or a textbook; it is what the students do in consequence of the use of such things.

2) What students do is a function of the role settings, the "ecological units" (Barker and Gump, 1964, pp. 11-18), which the school provides and the numbers of those settings in relation to numbers of students. Not all students, for instance, can recite at one time in the classroom setting. Only one can play the lead in a senior play, or be team captain of the varsity. The more settings or situations per student the greater the educational potential per student.

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The results of a study of the role settings schools provide, done by Barker and Gump in rural and small-town Kansas high schools of different sizes, runs completely counter to popular arguments for consolidation which have emphasized the economic efficiency gained by fuller exploitation of plant and staff resources in the larger school. It shows that, proportionally, the big school offers fewer settings per student than does the small, ultimately pointing out the advantage of the small school in creating a greater variety of roles per student. The large school tends to permit more specialization but, at the same time, leaves the student more often in an anonymous observer rather than a responsible participant role.

The Barker-and-Gump findings do not necessarily indict the larger school--though it is easy to jump to the rather sensational inference that the student unrest and even violence that has invaded some of the large schools of the nation may be explained in that the big school tends to leave students in anonymous roles, providing more on-looker situations in which the pressures are more toward concern for "Who am I?" than for "What is to be done?" (Barker and Gump, 1964, p. 25.) The authors draw the implication from their studies that it is difficult to eat your cake and have it too--to have the advantages of course variety and possible specialization for the student in the large school on the one hand and of active role identification for him on the other hand in the small--though the suggestion is that it is probably easier to enrich the small-school program with course variety and specialization than it is to give the student more active, responsible roles in a large one (Barker and Gump, p. 201.)

A partial empasse regarding size of school as well as character of program appears, therefore, to those of us in education who hold that learning is a function of the role a student has in a setting, that the character and quality of what a student learns is inevitably related to what he does, and that what he does is inevitably related to the role he sees himself filling in the situation. This is to suggest that an approach to evaluation of a school program--or of the performance of a teacher, for that matter--might be to judge the breadth and quality of the role-situations provided the students. We tend to count selected credits and courses; perhaps we should be counting settings, or situations, in which the school succeeds in involving students in selected role experiences. Doing so would seem to bring us closer to evaluation of the very stuff out of which education is actually made! (Barker and Gump, pp. 199-200.)

This study is to suggest just that to the teacher--to urge that the teacher ask himself: What roles do my students identify themselves as assuming in consequence of my work with them? What are the breadth and character of those roles and the experiences the role situations generate in my students?

The assignment as a role-creating device

The teacher has almost no control over the size of the school in which he teaches, nor over its organization, nor, in many schools, over the prescribed course content and pattern of the courses he teaches--unless by choosing beforehand in which school he will teach. He does, however, have some control over the situations he may create both in his classroom and in outside-class activities with students. The contention here is that by exercise of such control the teacher can break through

some of the empasses created by the particular size and organization of his school.

This writer was struck by an unspectacular little incident he observed years ago when two senior boys in a large high school (enrollment 3,800) where he taught, saying farewell in sentimental moments just before graduation, went to their freshman general science teacher simply to tell him that the assignment which they had done during their entire high school careers which they felt had been the most valuable to them, and in which they had taken the most pride, had been an extra-credit paper each had done in his general science class four years earlier--when they had "caught fire" on some interesting little subject, had spent Saturdays in museums and libraries and written letters and interviewed people in order to get their information, and nagged their teacher into giving them the suggestions, the right balance of criticism and encouragement, and the inspiration that prompted them to put all they had into their projects. One teacher had bullied, or freed, or encouraged, or inspired these two boys--four years before! This writer wondered what their other teachers had done since!

This incident was recalled with more significance when, in analyzing the data of the study reported here, the writer observed that some fifty percent of the seniors in one high school class reported a freshman English term paper as the assignment which had given them the most pride in achievement of any they had done so far in their high school careers. Again, one wonders, what happened that the zest for achievement, the enthusiasm, the inspiration which must have possessed those

students to some degree in one assignment when they were freshmen, had not reached an equal height during their sophomore, junior, and senior years. One ponders that there must be other assignments that could have put those students in as challenging roles!

Problem of this study

This study was to determine what kinds of assignments high school students in small-town and rural eastern Kentucky are given in their classes and to get their judgments of the value of those assignments. The basic concern was motivation: What assignments "turn students on" and which "turn them off"? Is the closely supervised assignment or the one which leaves the student to his own resources the more effective? Is the short-term, do-it-now assignment or the loose, long-term one, or one in-between, best? Is the strict-deadline mandate, or the when-and-if or extra-credit one, the better?

Several assumptions were made in the application of these questions in the study, most of them respecting the view that an assignment is essentially a teaching tool and that a particular tool might be better for one purpose or for one kind of material than for another. Assumptions were, for example, that:

1) An assignment which fits one purpose does not necessarily fit another, or that an assignment appropriate for one student, or subject, was not, per se, appropriate for another.
2) Students probably should have a variety of assignment experiences, reflecting the likelihood that real life provides or requires varied kinds of assignments.

3) Students could reasonably be expected to misjudge the value of some assignments. That is, students do not always know "what is good for them"--but their judgments should not be ignored.

Doctrine underlying these assumptions, obviously, is individual differences, which predicates that no two students are alike in ability, need, interest, emotional posture, and general attitude. Indeed, a given assignment is sure to place different students in different roles; what turns one into an eager explorer may turn another into a frustrated beggar.

Underlying this doctrine is the model of teaching strategy as essentially (among other considerations, of course) a problem of judging the proper balance between over-guidance and under-guidance of a student. Experiments have demonstrated that learning is bridging the known to the unknown: The child does not learn to write by having the teacher write for him; neither does he learn by being simply told to write. The best instruction is somewhere in between--depending upon the student. The less he knows, or the more fearful he is, the more guidance he needs; but until he begins to "do it himself" he does not learn--and he can learn dependency instead of how to write if he is not placed in a situation which requires or at least permits him to write. This means that an assignment which may generate activity--and even enthusiasm and inspiration to achieve--in one student may do the opposite for another--may overwhelm him, discourage him, and lead him to dread or even fear the assignment to the point of paralysis.

This model appears somewhat substantiated in the study by the fact that the long-range project assignment (the term paper, for instance) was selected by some as the most challenging assignment of their high school experiences while it was selected by others as the greatest waste of time.

An assignment--given by a teacher or self-imposed by the student--has value as it places the student in a role to deal with whatever situation the assignment imposes (or offers as an opportunity). If it requires a passive, dependent role of him (performing a drill assignment, for instance), he learns what he does--and certainly skill development can be both useful and rewarding. It must be noted that the skill he develops is one he has learned to operate in a given role, and that--rather than only one--he needs a wide repertoire of role experiences to deal with life--roles requiring everything from ability to make change in a store and read road signs to leadership, responsibility, self-reliance, cooperativeness, patience with others, faith in reason, persistence, etc. He should have his eggs in many baskets.

The assignment, for purposes of this study, therefore, was perceived to be the prime instrument, device, or means by which the teacher may generate role situations in which students, in order to deal with the requirements of these situations, will develop into the kinds of people the school is intended to produce. That is, only as the teacher is able, by the assignment he gives his students, to get them to experience the roles required for effective living will he succeed in teaching the elements of successful living.

What assignment was most challenging?

First, seniors were asked to describe briefly the assignment they had had in high school that they felt had been the most challenging and had given them the most pride on completion,* then to do the same for one that they regarded as the greatest waste of time. Then they were asked to classify these respectively on a scale between the short-term, do-it-now type and the long-range, you're-on-your-own type. For 52 seniors in three of the schools who responded to a six-point scale between 1, Do-this-now type to 6, Do-something-if-and-how-you-wish type the median response was 5, Do-it-all-yourself type, for the most challenging assignment. On the other hand, for 37 responses typing the greatest-waste assignment, the median was the 3, Choose-what-to-do-within-limits type.

For the other high school, where the question was put differently, the median response from 79 seniors was that the most challenging assignment was in the middle, the 2, Problem type, on a three-point scale from 1, Do-it-this-way type to 3, Exploration type. The median for the greatest-waste assignment was, for 86 who responded, 1, Do-it-this-way type on the same scale. Obviously the assignment which left more responsibility to the student tended to inspire him more.

Must the student like the assignment?

A widely accepted principle of motivation is that the initial attitude of a student toward his task is important in his subsequent

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*Another question used initially called for an assignment from which the student learned the most, if it was different from the most "challenging" one. Mostly, the same one was reported, so the distinction is not made here.

achievement. A question used in the study was aimed at determining what the student's attitude had been when he got the assignment, to see whether or not this principle operated.

Inspection of Table 1 makes two things obvious:

1) Many assignments first regarded with distaste or apathy did turn out to be challenging.
2) Even so, a greater proportion of assignments regarded as a waste of time were, after reflection, regarded as distasteful.

It is a suggestion that perhaps a before-the-fact questioning would have resulted in a smaller proportion of assignments being regarded as distasteful. In fact, some students reporting assignments which were the greatest waste of time complained that their papers were never graded or were even openly thrown in the waste basket, when, obviously, the experience of writing a paper, for instance, has no relation to what the teacher ultimately does with it--except as the student learns, let us say, disillusionment out of the whole experience.

It does seem important to consider that the unpleasantness one recognizes upon recall of an assignment perhaps depends somewhat upon its ultimate outcome but that there are assignments which are initially unwelcomed which do develop into challenging and zestful experiences. Indeed, the frequency with which students indicated that they were "uneasy at the prospect" of their most challenging assignment suggests that "liking" an assignment is not necessarily basic to its ultimate value.

TABLE 1

ATTITUDE TOWARD "MOST CHALLENGING" AND
"GREATEST WASTE OF TIME" ASSIGNMENTS
SENIORS IN FOUR HIGH SCHOOLS
(Number in classes, 317)

	Most Challenging Assignment	Greatest Waste of Time Assignment
Disliked whole idea	52	194
Uneasy at prospect	98	19
"Just another Assignment"	74	57
Enthusiastic at prospect	89	19
No response	4	28

Kinds of assignments--Challenge vs. Waste

Table 2, interpreting the kinds of assignments students reported as most challenging, supports the term paper (or "research paper") as one which generates in the student a feeling of pride in doing a piece of work which is his and which demands something of him.

It appears also, however, that a good assignment may be worn out. A number of students in one school complained that a conservation essay required of everyone in English year after year was a "waste of time"--though reported by a few as a zestful experience.

TABLE 2

KINDS OF ASSIGNMENTS SENIORS IN FOUR HIGH SCHOOLS NAMED AS "MOST CHALLENGING" AND "GREATEST WASTE OF TIME" (Number in classes, 317)

	Most Challenging Assignment	Greatest Waste of Time Assignment
Term paper	129	18
Book report	3	25
Creative writing and themes	24	36
Creative construction work (using the hands)	31	19
Speech assignments	24	7
Laboratory or field experiments or exploration	19	5
Miscellaneous tedious, difficult projects, such as outlines, or looking up answers	32	135
Courses named, but no definition of assignment reported	15	11
Unclassified, or no response	40	61

Again, a point especially worthy of note is that what is a challenge to one student is sometimes defeat for another. The term paper, utterly condemned as a waste of time by a few, was viewed by an overwhelming plurality as their most rewarding assignment. English, which came in for much condemnation as a time-waster (see Table 3) had its friends also who supported it as providing the most inspiring experiences.

TABLE 3

SOURCES OF ASSIGNMENTS NAMED AS "MOST CHALLENGING" AND AS "GREATEST WASTE OF TIME" BY SENIORS IN FOUR HIGH SCHOOLS
(Number in classes, 317)

Subject Area	Most Challenging Assignment	Greatest Waste of Time Assignment
Art	7	2
Commercial subjects	12	15
English-Speech	127	97
Foreign Language	6	6
Health-Physical Educ.	1	6
Home Economics - Indust. Arts	28	1
Mathematics	15	18
Music and Music Appreciation	3	5
Physiology - Biology - Gen. Sci.	18	17
Social Studies (including Psychology)	42	49
Miscellaneous - no course named	52	63
No response, or report that all assignments were helpful	6	38

It must be considered, in viewing the tables here, that some subjects get named more often than others in various categories just because they are taken by more students. Comparisons should be made on the basis of the proportion each subject contributes in the categories counter to each other: challenge vs. waste-of-time.

A suggestion is that such a table indicating sources of kinds of assignments reported by the students in a given school may bear some study by the various departments of the school, for judging whether or not a desirable balance of challenging assignments is represented in respective areas--or, over-balance of assignments which are a "waste of time." Perhaps also, some departments may reflect that their assignments are plodding and tepid, being neither challenging nor frustrating.

Teacher's role in student's performance of assignment

Then, an attempt was made to determine what the students perceived the role of the teacher to be in their carrying out of these two different kinds of assignments--whether the student felt the teacher was a close-prompter on the one hand or one who threw the student entirely on his own--or, somewhere in between, whether pushing the student and "kibitzing" to be sure he did it right or just available to help if needed. Table 4 interprets these reports.

The distributions of responses in Table 4 regarding the role of the teacher in the students' performance of challenging assignments provides some basis for judgment--without, of course, providing any judgment. It is a matter of opinion, for instance, whether or not the frequency reported of the teacher's rewarding the student for doing exactly as told, rather than using his own initiative, is too great one way or the other. Perhaps such information gathered by a teacher from his own classes would be helpful if he wished to judge what emphasis he was placing in his own work with students. It may be gratifying to note (Table 5) that students in the study did appear to feel teachers were available to help them in

TABLE 4

ROLE OF TEACHER IN STUDENT'S CARRYING OUT CHALLENGING ASSIGNMENTS, REPORTED BY SENIORS IN THREE HIGH SCHOOLS*
(Number in classes, 194)

Teacher's Behavior:	Yes	Some-what	No	No Response
Told student exactly what to do	73	78	38	5
Gave general directions	100	57	29	8
Was available to help if needed	131	28	27	8
Threw student "on his own"	24	43	121	6
Teacher gave most credit for:	**Mostly**	**Some-what**	**Little**	**No Response**
Doing exactly as told	60	80	48	6
Using own initiative	84	65	41	4
Student working out his own way	52	74	57	11

*Only three of the four classes included in this table, since the question was reworded after initial experience.

TABLE 5

HOW STUDENT WORKED AT "MOST CHALLENGING" AND "GREATEST WASTE" ASSIGNMENTS, REPORTED BY SENIORS IN FOUR HIGH SCHOOLS
(Number in classes, 317)

Way Student Worked	Most Challenging Assignment	Greatest Waste of Time Assignment
Worked alone, using others as resources but at own direction	133	107
Got suggestions from teacher or others, but not directions	65	44
Worked as part of committee, but got own credit	10	23
Part of "team" and shared credit	14	28
Other, or no response	95	115

their most challenging assignments when wanted, and that more students worked under general directions--and therefore, presumably, with some latitude for exercising their own judgments--than under exact instructions.

Obviously, the students reporting how they worked on the "wasteful" assignment must generally have felt themselves cut off from help, since the "worked alone" category prevailed. It would appear that effort directed toward helping them find out how to use available resources and to work with other people might hold promise.

"Team" types of assignments appeared comparatively few times in either "challenging" or "wasteful" classifications. They appeared more often, however, for the wasteful rather than the challenging assignments--suggesting that the "team" assignment does not necessarily resolve the problem of giving the student the support he needs. On the other hand, it would appear that using the "team" or committee assignment would broaden student experiences in terms of real life demands, especially for students who have not yet developed the necessary degree of self-reliance for some roles. (Coleman, 1961, pp. 309-328). On the other hand, the role requiring self-reliance is certainly essential--and the best evidence of need for it might be the inadequacy of students in fulfilling assignments requiring it!

Types of Assignment Representative of Subject Areas

Seniors were asked to indicate the sources of various types of assignments. Table 6 interprets the results.

It is to be noted, for the high schools of the study, that medium and long-range assignments were provided with little frequency in some areas where there would appear good opportunity to provide them--e.g., the sciences and foreign languages, and to an extent, speech and dramatics.

TABLE 6

FREQUENCY WITH WHICH DIFFERENT SUBJECT AREAS PROVIDED DIFFERENT TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS AS REPORTED BY SENIORS IN FOUR HIGH SCHOOLS
(Number in classes, 317)

Courses	Short-Range Do-This-Now	Medium-Range	Long-Range
Art	11	16	4
General, Biological Science	29	16	10
Commercial	89	46	27
English, Literature, Reading	206	139	105
Foreign Languages	7	5	2
Home Economics	14	19	12
Mathematics	34	18	8
Music	6	7	6
Health and Physical Educ.	11	6	1
Physical Science	33	10	2
Social Studies	90	59	41
Speech and Dramatics	29	24	14
Total	559	365	232

What is a "waste-of-time" assignment like?

In an attempt to get some insight into the reasons why students do not exploit the possibilities which some assignments represent (since obviously some of the same ones are a challenge to other students) the assignments reported as "waste of time" were categorized descriptively. As Table 7 shows, the assignment which the student perceives as the greatest waste of time is one which, as he sees it, has no relevance, meaning, or point to him. Some of the reports of challenging assignments from students suggested that had the student not "broken through" to where he saw some point to the assignment it might have turned out a "waste of

time." Perhaps some greater effort by teachers to make assignments in terms of individual student interests, and/or to make greater effort to get students to see the point of assignments they are given, could turn some from waste to challenge. This suggestion can best be effected, of course, if teachers review the assignments they are giving in relation to the individual interests and capacities of their students.

TABLE 7

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSIGNMENTS SENIORS OF FOUR HIGH SCHOOLS REPORTED AS "WASTE OF TIME"
(Number in classes 317)

	Number of Times Names
Labor without point as perceived by student, or unrelated to his interest	163
Routine, repetitious, or labor not perceived as valuable	48
Labor ignored	41
Punitive assignments	12
Courses named but no assignment described, or too general to classify	15
None reported, or statement that no assignment was "waste of time"	38

Outside-of-class activities

Now all of school is not in the classroom. Extracurricular activities provide many roles for students; indeed, extracurricular program expansion provides an obvious way of enlarging and enriching role-situation offerings per student regardless of size of school. The teacher, in his position as sponsor or advisor to extracurricular student activities,

has some control over the number and quality of the role-situations his activities provide and in the deployment of student assignments to them.

If the teacher assumes that he is, first of all, a teacher in his role as activity sponsor, it follows that he will be concerned to see that the student who needs and is ready for an experience of managerial responsibility, for example, is assigned to execute a project--regardless of the fact that there may be others who could handle the job better but who have less need. That is, the perspective of the teacher will be: "How can this assignment be used to help a student develop?" rather than, "Who will do this job best?" (The choice between teaching and winning, of course, often becomes a mean one, particularly considering that the conscientious teacher will have serious concern that he avoid placing a student in a role which could leave him devastated by a defeat for which he might feel humiliated before his peers.) This writer views such decisions as difficult--as good teaching is difficult.

To get some perspective of what the repertoire of role-situations the total programs of the schools provided, the study was directed toward an inventory of student roles operating both inside and outside the classroom.

The students were asked to scan a list of 28 roles assumed to be representatively required for effective living today, then to indicate what ones they had found themselves occupying during the past and current year. (The purpose was to get some total view of what situations the school actually provided by courses and out-of-class activities.)

There is too little space for detailed treatment of the results here, since this article has its focus upon classroom assignments. It

is worth reporting, however, that as one might expect, the extracurricular programs drew more reports of various role situations produced for students than did classes by a ratio of more than four to one. Not only did students report experiencing the roles more frequently out of their extracurricular activities but the range of roles reported was broader for non-class activities than for class activities. For instance, boys reported 334 extracurricular roles in 28 categories but only 74 course-connected roles in 20 categories. Girls reported 441 extracurricular roles in 28 categories but only 110 class-connected roles in 11 categories.

It seems likely that students do not always regard the fact that they have a "role" when they perform an assignment--that what they do as class work is not regarded as placing them in a central position regarding performance before the teacher and their peers, as does an extracurricular assignment. Perhaps the fact that class assignments are often the same for all, rather than especially for the individual student as they tend to be in extracurricular activities, may be important. Perhaps the student fails to see that he is central in the classroom assignment <u>because</u>, unlike the extracurricular assignment, it is not <u>his</u>, or <u>his</u> team's.

<u>Over-all, what situations are "high" and "low" for students?</u>

In order to determine the sources of the experiences which the students valued and bemeaned most in their high school careers, the senior was asked to describe briefly the experience which he regarded as the "high point" of his high school career so far, and, conversely, the experience he regarded as the "low point." The responses were then classified by the patterns represented in tables 8 and 9.

TABLE 8

CLASSIFICATIONS OF "HIGH POINT" EXPERIENCES REPORTED BY SENIORS IN FOUR HIGH SCHOOLS

Type of "High Point" Experience	Number Listing Type	
	Class	Out-of Class
Victories, honors	43	52
Belongingness--feeling of being accepted	3	61
Personal satisfaction--that experience itself was good	65	11
Relief that decision is made	15	
Unclassifiable or illegible	67	

TABLE 9

CLASSIFICATION OF "LOW POINT" EXPERIENCES REPORTED BY SENIORS IN FOUR HIGH SCHOOLS

Type of "Low Point" Experience	Number Listing Type	
	Class	Out-of Class
Defeats, frustrations, disappointments, embarrassments	84	36
Emptiness, boredom	100	3
Unclassifiable or illegible	94	

The rationale for these classifications grows out of concern for the answer to the question: What can the school do to create "high point" experiences of character supportive of the goals of the school? This question led to two more:

1) What is the source of the experience which appeared to the student to be rewarding? Also, the unrewarding--so that we know what to avoid? Was it out of some class assignment, or out of an extracurricular assignment--or something incidental to the school program?

2) What kind of motivation evoked the response which the student experienced? Was it person-centered satisfaction? Or satisfaction shared in the "reflected glory" of a group? Or satisfaction of being accepted and "belonging" as part of a group? Or satisfaction of feeling personal growth and increased self-assurance--or appreciation for the experience in and of itself? (These last two were combined for practical reasons since they appeared to represent motivation based on the value the student placed on the activity itself, rather than on external reward, such as high grades or honors.) Or, was it the converse of these, which led to the "low point" experience?

The responses did not, in many instances, provide an insight into <u>why</u> the student regarded an experience as "high" or "low," being simply the naming of a class or incident. Also, blends of motivation appeared: The student who "gloried" in his victory of a high grade did not appear to differ, in basic motivation, from the one who feared he was going to fail but succeeded in getting a barely passing grade. Also, the line between <u>boredom</u> because little happened in the class (that

called for reporting an English class as a "low point," for instance) and frustration because "too much" happened (so that the student was confused) is difficult to draw. There did appear to be useful distinctions, however, between responses which revealed that students are deeply resentful of the teacher who holds them in class but provides little, or repetitious, or confusing content. Some teachers were praised; some were utterly condemned--not by name, but by courses and situations. The following classified quotations will perhaps illustrate perspectives expressed in the various categories, on the basis of motivation, into which (to considerable extent arbitrarily) responses to the questions regarding both "high point" and "low point" experiences were classified. (See tables 10 and 11.)

It is perhaps worth noting that the "high point" experiences are fairly equally distributed between in-class and out-of-class situations, but that, especially in the second category, belongingness, the out-of-class situations prevailed strongly. Conversely, the class situations predominated in the choice of personal satisfaction experiences as a "high point."

TABLE 10

MOTIVES AND CATEGORIES OF ACTIVITIES
REPRESENTED IN REPORTS OF "HIGH POINT"
EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

Class Experiences	Out-of-Class Experiences
Victories, honors	
"It was really a tough assignment and when I did it I felt so good. It meant a lot because I got a good grade and I worked alone."	"The senior class was selling magazines and the person who had sold the highest in the first week won $5. I won. It gave me confidence within myself . . ."
"When I really studied for a hard test and thought I had failed it, then I found out that I passed it with a good grade."	"The high point was when our team won the district basketball tournament. Everyone celebrated this event and it meant a lot to us because we had worked for it."
"I still must turn to the term paper which gave me the feeling of accomplishing something big on my own."	"I was elected cheerleader . . . It meant a lot to know that the students wanted me as one of their cheerleaders."
Belongingness--feeling of being accepted	
"The high point . . . has been in Home Ec. class . . . I . . . learned to share things and to get along with other people."	"My high point is getting to know the kids and to associate with them . . ."
"It didn't seem like going to school. . . You can talk and if you need help or to discuss something with the instructor. He is there and you don't seem awkward toward him . . . you can tell him exactly what you think and he will either agree or disagree."	"Going to the prom. All my friends had a good time together."
"Having a teacher who helped me not only in my school but if something was troubling one of us he would try to understand why. . ."	"I've learned how to talk more freely with people since I started high school. Also getting high school ring."
	"I became a manager on the basketball team and traveled with the team. I knew after I had graduated I would look back and remember some of the times I've had. Another 'high point' was the feeling of becoming a senior."
Personal satisfaction and interest	
"In biology we experimented and actually did the things we read about instead of just reading and going along with the book. Students are curious people--we like to see things done and know why things are done."	"Being able to tour. We toured Washington D. C. I am in Upward Bound and we all took a trip. . ."
"The high point was being in government class."	"I helped build the walks made of concrete for our school."
"Taking Home Ec . . . made a skirt. . . Because I had made something."	"Working on the prom out of class. Worked to fix up lunchroom. I bound paper and wound wires and rolled paper. A lot of kids in class were helping because I was part of it."
	"In auto mechanics, when we started working with my hands and mind and doing what I wanted to do."

TABLE 10--Continued

Relief on Decision:
"I would feel better when I took my books home and got my homework because it took some of the pressure off of me."
"Deciding to go to vocational school. I found out it was something I liked and interesting."
"The guidance officer's help . . . talked to him, trying to decide what I wanted to do after I'm a graduate. I know what I'm going to do ahead."
"My decision of courses for my senior year . . ."

TABLE 11

MOTIVES AND CATEGORIES OF ACTIVITIES REPRESENTED IN REPORTS OF "LOW POINT" EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

Class Experiences*	Out-of-Class Experiences
Defeats, frustrations, disappointments, embarrassments	
"Getting an F in Literature IV class. I was really expecting it but I just prayed I wouldn't get it, but I did and I was very embarrassed and disappointed with myself." "Disciplinary work for talking--got a low grade for work I thought well done." "When I made a C in Composition. I was frustrated because I couldn't do better." "The low point of my high school years was in Geometry class. I hated it . . . I was bored . . . frustrated because it was so hard. . . don't believe I learned anything." "Having to be in a fashion show for Home Ec. We wore things that didn't look good, like pants too short, big shoes. It really embarrassed me. We put it on for the whole school."	"Loss of spirit in the varsity basketball team, because they play poorly and the coach refuses to put in better players." "Since I was a freshman I signed up for Peppers Club and each year I was turned down. This really disappoints me because all that is ever in there is the "top class" of people and I don't feel they are one bit better than I am or I'm any better than they are. Everything you ever try to do mostly depends on your social rank not just you as a person." "My first speech tournament when I really messed it up."
Emptiness, boredom	
"In certain classes I'm just bored because we don't do anything but just listen to the teacher talk." "I was most bored in my freshman science class. Most of the time our teacher gave us study hall. We didn't cover many chapters and those covered weren't thorough." "Biology class because I never learned anything or the class as a whole never really did anything." "Bored out of my wits, I sit watching the clock and doodling on paper anxious to get out of that class. The situation was listening to a teacher explaining a chapter--really reading out of the book--which I had already read. . .and teacher with monotone nasal voice." "Study hall, the biggest waste of class time."	"Bored having to go to the auditorium and listen to representatives from different colleges." "Trying to help a senior class (and school student body) that hasn't got enough sense to help itself . . . Ring dance--and other catastrophes!" "I was bored at the prom."

*A few which might have been classified as "discipline" are reported here.

Although victories-honors were named predominantly as out-of-class experiences representing high points by students in combined "class" and "out-of-class" categories, it appears that personal satisfaction, rather than academic honors (which may be assumed to represent grades or other scholastic rewards) are of greater value to students in their class experiences. It is perhaps worth considering, also, that all three kinds of motivation operated both in- and out-of-class and that the plurality for the in-class category expressing value of personal satisfaction was comparable to that of the out-of-class value, belongingness, suggesting that students wish acceptance of themselves by both themselves and their peers and teachers. (See Table 8.)

A surprising kind of response, at least to the investigator, was a group which expressed what ordinarily one might regard as "relief" as a high point. While the frequency was not great, it would appear worthy of note that several students reported the making of a decision--the settling of some matter--as a high point. This fact would suggest that the guidance role of the school is important, that helping young people reach conslusions about what they wish to and are capable of doing is more important than the routine character of operation of a school would tend to imply.

It is perhaps worth considering that the same experience may have exactly antithetical interpretation by two different students--as per the saying: What is one man's medicine is another man's poison. What may challenge one student is sure to dishearten another--as was perhaps even more clearly implied by a previous treatment of responses regarding challenging vs. waste-of-time assignments.

Some of the responses, as might be anticipated, probably represented "therapeutic griping," or students' efforts to get revenge for the real or imagined wrongs done them by some teachers. Even as such, the results may be regarded as useful "feedback" for those teachers who are earnestly seeking to understand their students. That it is necessary, however, for the staff to have more particularized results than can be provided in this report is, of course, obvious. The instruments should be used for getting a general picture, but also to bring to the attention of teachers things they may be doing unintentionally. (It seems unlikely, for instance, that teachers would purposely embarrass students in a planned activity--at least if they anticipated embarrassment as the ultimate major impact of the activity. Yet, several students perceived the outcome of some teacher-planned experiences in such a way that embarrassment, as the student saw it, was the prime consequence.) Also, it would appear worthwhile that teachers review particularly the reports in the category, "Emptiness, Boredom," in which there are complaints of repetitiousness or lack of substance in what goes on in the classroom--though these criticisms are in many instances countered by reports of high points and challenging assignments created by inspiring teachers.

It may be gratifying to consider, incidentally, that the school appears to run the gamut of experience from victory to defeat, from ecstacy to frustration--as does life itself. Certainly it is crucial that the school staffs consider the fact that frustration and defeat may

be, in the proper context, desirable learning experiences to students; yet it should not be overlooked, also, that unless they are used in such a way that students learn how to cope with frustration and defeat, they may produce undesirable learning!

Summary: Some choices at issue

The model of teaching assumed in this study was: Effective teaching places the teacher in an eternal dilemma between guiding enough, on the one hand, and guiding too much on the other. To overguide produces dependency, limits initiative, restricts the development of resourceful, intellectually self-driven students. To underguide produces frustrated, confused, even bewildered and disheartened students to whom school is a "tale told by an idiot." The strategic choice between these extremes is sure to vary student by student--despite the fact that, for the most part, it appears that all students of a class tend to be given the same assignment (with notable exceptions, of course).

It is hoped that the approaches developed and applied in this study will enable school staffs in any school to gather information useful as a basis for making better judgments about where the balance of emphasis in assignments might be placed for more effective teaching. Such a study cannot tell a teacher exactly what to do; it can, however, give him some insights and make him sensitive regarding the hazards of over and under guidance of his students.

It is axiomatic that the best school program is one best adapted to the needs of students. It follows that the best school provides the widest repertoire of role situations for students and that it gets the most of its students as individuals involved in those rolls. It is difficult to plan a school program that will provide the flexibility, range, and depth required to do this. Ultimately, that task comes down to the individual teacher and the assignment given each pupil. Yet, individual efforts need coordination.

Efforts to make correction in program in one respect may compete with or subtract from the program in other respects. For instance, it appears from this study that the long-range project (the "term paper," for instance, or other future-goal-directed, planned activity--manual, artistic, or intellectual) seems to provide students the most gratifying experience, according to reports by senior students of assignments as well as "high points" of their high school careers. On the other hand, there were many students who often rejected such long-range activities as frustrating and pointless--presumably often because those students were dependent upon their teachers for the security of limited, exact assignments. To "inflict" a student not mature enough for such assignments--at least without some attempt to bolster his self-confidence or to give him insight into the point of the assignment--would be an obvious mistake.

Also, eager and responsible as some students may be, it would be unfortunate if term projects, for example, were permitted to pyramid in the program--so that at the end of a term a student faced an accumulation of deadlines for projects in several courses. There are many short- and

medium-term assignments which can absorb the interests of students in activities requiring leadership, responsibility, accountability, creativity, patience, exactitude, respect for deadlines, teamwork, ability to mobilize and coordinate various resources, and capacity for planning--all experiences related to the capacity to cope with life. This is to suggest: Teachers individually might do well to review their course assignments to appraise them for balance (between short, medium, and long-term projects, for instance) to ponder how their assignments challenge their students and whether they create a wide range and variety of role situations. It might be well also, however, for teachers to "conspire" a bit to see that the program is in balance in total--that all teachers do not demand all assignments at once, for instance--or even to arrange that some teachers provide some kinds of assignments while others provide others--and that there not be big "gaps" or duplications in the range of situations provided. An occasional check might be made, for example, into whether or not students feel under too great pressure--and some pressure obviously goes with zestful and enthusiastic living--or whether, on the other hand, school is in large part a listless drifting, with time too cheap as many reports of student boredom suggest.

This study, unfortunately, reaches no conclusion that individual needs of students can be met by use of some <u>general</u> approach. Neither does it permit escape from the eternal dilemma of the teacher: If he is over-specific in assignments he may contribute to the production of the "intellectual ditchdigger," a dependent, rigid, unresourceful student

or a passive on-looker. If he is too general, he may contribute to the confusion, frustration, and defeat of the student.

This study also echoes an implication of the Barker and Gump studies: That we consider evaluating a school in terms of the quality and quantity of role situations it provides per student.

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